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CAMPGROUNDS FOR MANY TASTES

CURRENT SERIAL RESEARCH

Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station
Forest Service
U. S. Department of Agriculture
Ogden, Utah
Joseph F. Pechanec, Director

THE AUTHOR

J. ALAN WAGAR, research forester specializing in forest recreation, joined the Intermountain Station staff in 1962. Prior to this he spent 3 years in recreation research with the Northeastern Forest Experiment Station. He was graduated from the College of Forestry at the University of Washington and holds master's and doctoral degrees in forestry from the University of Michigan.

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J. Alan Wagar

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This publication is a product of a cooperative outdoor recreation research program by Utah State University, Logan, Utah, and the Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, Ogden, Utah.

INTRODUCTION

This paper departs widely from the usual pattern of research reports. The reader will find here no tabulated data, no statistics or equations, no bibliography of authoritative publications on the subject. Rather, he will find results of an exploration of the boundaries and content of a general but concrete concept of the kinds of campground facilities that might and should be available on public and private lands to enable American citizenry to enjoy their outdoor heritage.

For many people camping is an essential ingredient of outdoor recreation — either as a worthwhile experience in itself or as a means of reaching and remaining near other recreational opportunities. But all campers do not seek the same types of experiences and do not want to use the same kinds of camping areas or facilities.

Like other people, campers come in many varieties. Some prefer to be surrounded by all the conveniences of home and by the sociability and security of other people. By contrast, a few campers pack their equipment across miles of rugged country in search of solitude and truly wild surroundings. Others want as much wilderness as they can reach by automobile. Camping tastes of all shades lie between these extremes of complete convenience and wilderness surroundings.

Campers who find facilities matched to their individual interests are delighted. But when someone seeking solitude arrives at a large and elaborate camp, he may be just as unhappy as the gregarious, comfort-seeking camper who stops at a tiny campground that has only minimum facilities. Fortunately there are lands suitable for every part of the broad spectrum of camping needs. But, without planning, these lands will not contribute their full measure of benefits either to recreationists or to other land users.

If campgrounds are to provide maximum benefits and enjoyment, land managers must recognize that campers have an extremely wide variety of needs and that the camping facilities suited to these needs will vary accordingly. To serve this whole range of needs will probably require the efforts of several agencies, plus private enterprise. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to emphasize the range of campground needs and to suggest a classification that may help recreation planners meet the full spectrum of campers' needs. This paper does not discuss needs for camps to be used by organizations or large groups.

The suggested classification is given below and is illustrated in figure 1:

1. Central camps
2. Forest camps
3. Peakload camps
4. Long-term camps
5. Travelers' camps
6. Large back-country camps
7. Small back-country camps

Of course, it is recognized that other campground classifications are possible. The important point is that a variety of campgrounds is needed.

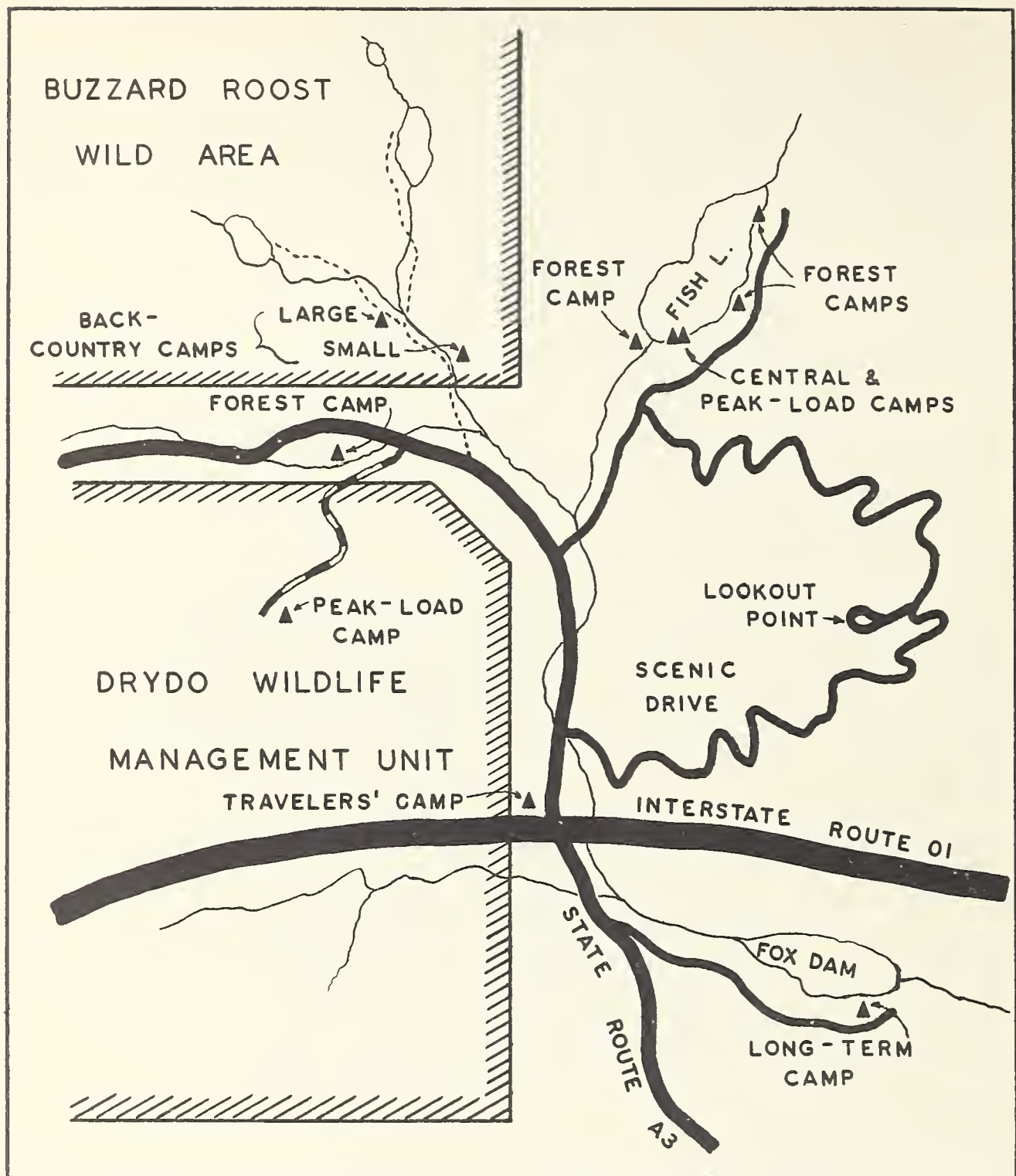


Figure 1.—Campgrounds for many tastes in a recreation region. The **central camp** on Fish Lake provides a comfortable headquarters with complete facilities. **Forest camps** have minimum facilities and wide spacing to preserve the forest environment. The **peakload camps** provide an overflow area for the central camp and a base for seasonal use of the wildlife management unit. The privately owned **long-term camp** at Fox Dam rents spaces by the month or season. On Route 01 the concession-operated **travelers' camp** rents overnight camping facilities. Along the trail into the wild areas, **large** and **small back-country camps** provide for large and small trail groups. Beyond the trail junction, rates of use have not yet required the establishment of permanent campsites.

CAMPGROUNDS ACCESSIBLE BY AUTOMOBILE

CENTRAL CAMPS

Many of today's campers lack the experience, equipment, and state of mind needed to be comfortable amid truly primitive surroundings. Yet these same people seek the outdoors and apparently have much to gain from outdoor experiences. Their needs might best be met by **central camps** that provide maximum facilities and a comfortable headquarters from which visitors can see or venture into the outdoors (fig. 2).

The experience offered by central camps would be only one step more primitive than staying in a cabin — with the scenery provided more by the surrounding countryside than by the camp itself. For example, a worthwhile camping trip might depend far more on a pleasant view from camp than on whether there is pavement or pine litter underfoot. Also, for many persons the presence of numerous other campers and elaborate facilities seems to enhance rather than detract from an enjoyable stay. So, recreation planners probably should not design all camping areas to an arbitrary standard of naturalness.

The usual procedure for maintaining attractive campgrounds has been to space campsites widely to assure light use per total area — placing sole reliance on the area's natural capacity for self-repair. But in central camps, attractiveness could also be maintained by such management procedures as irrigation, planting, thinning, fertilizing, paving, frequent policing, and increased use of barriers — augmenting the natural capacity for self-repair. This might permit intensities of use that would justify such comforts as flush toilets, showers, laundry facilities, and other services for the many campers who want them. Trailer hookups for water, sewage, and electricity might also be perfectly acceptable for this class of campgrounds.

Design should be flexible enough to provide for trailers, coaches on pickups, station wagons, and a variety of tent designs. Now, for example, campers who have tents attached to cars are often forced to stay in parking areas because so many campsites are designed to separate the parking from the tent area.

Wherever possible, central camps should be located several miles from main highways in regions rich in recreation opportunities. Although these camps should be in pleasant surroundings, they should not encroach upon sites for specific recreational activities. Instead, these central camps should provide a headquarters from which campers could reach a variety of attractions such as scenic drives, nature trails, fishing waters, and areas where wildlife is likely to be seen. Distances to these attractions might range from a short walk to several hours of hiking or driving.

The size of central camps might range from about 30 to several hundred campsites—depending on demand, durability of the surrounding resource, and the capacity of neighboring campgrounds.

FOREST CAMPS

The desires of campers who want a good measure of naturalness mixed with their camping might be met by **forest camps** (fig. 3). Here some management and artificiality might be essential to prevent campgrounds from deteriorating with use. But the accent would be on maintaining a largely natural environment—requiring minimum facilities and perhaps no more than 8 or 10 widely spaced campsites per campground.

In certain situations it might be desirable to space forest camps around a central camp—some within walking distance, others within a short drive. Campers from the neighboring camps could then walk or ride to the central camp for showers and other services. These services to forest camp users might justify having complete facilities at central camps without the latter being too large or overcrowded. Since people would have access to convenience as well as isolation and naturalness, they could choose whatever mixture best suited their individual tastes. Giving scattered campers the use of central camp facilities might also reduce demands for elaborate facilities at forest camps; these could remain small, simple, and fairly natural. However, not all forest camps would need to be associated with central camps.



Photo: U. S. Forest Service

Figure 2.—The central camp would provide a comfortable headquarters from which visitors could see or venture into the outdoors. (Nicolet National Forest, Wisconsin.)



Photo: U. S. Forest Service

Figure 3.—The forest camp would have a few widely spaced campsites, minimum facilities, and a rather natural environment. (Sawtooth National Forest, Idaho.)

Figure 4.—Peakload camps would handle temporary crowds. These Fourth-of-July campers could find no unoccupied sites in the regular campground. (Nicolet National Forest, Wisconsin.)

Photo: U. S. Forest Service



Forest camps probably should be some distance from main highways and near specific recreational opportunities such as outstanding scenery, hiking trails, or particularly pleasant surroundings. Great care would have to be taken that the number and spacing of campsites did not exceed the capacity of the recreational opportunity. For example, 10 campsites should not be placed where the main attraction is a fishing stream that can withstand only 20 man-days of fishing per year. Nor should campsites be crowded so closely that campers lose the solitude and naturalness that many visitors to this type of area would be seeking.

PEAKLOAD CAMPS

In many areas peak numbers of campers occur for only a short time (fig. 4). Examples are holiday crowds, users of hunting camps, and groups on field trips. Portable facilities, especially water tanks and toilets, might be moved about to meet temporary needs. Where use will recur each year, as in overflow camping areas and hunting camps, **peakload camps** could be established by marking campsites and installing fireplaces. Concrete anchors might also be installed so that lightweight tables could be fastened securely in place while in use.

LONG-TERM CAMPS

In some parts of the country, families like to camp for long periods — perhaps a month or more — without moving (fig. 5). Thus, **long-term camps** may be desirable where demand for this type of camping is great and where they would not deny camping opportunities to visitors who have less time to spend. These camps could be large or small, simple or elaborate. The primary considerations would be to provide enjoyable camping, to protect the site, and to collect sufficient fees to be self-supporting. On public lands, these campgrounds should not be located where they would monopolize areas needed by other campers. If pressures for short-time camping increased, long-term camping privileges might be stopped after one or more years of warning. Depending on their location and design, these areas would then become central camps or forest camps.

Where camping fees are charged, the longer a camper stays, the more predictable

the income he provides. For this reason, long-term camps might offer a reasonable business venture for owners of private lands or for concessionaires on public lands. Because these campgrounds would give exclusive use to very few people, they probably should, as already mentioned, be self-supporting.

TRAVELERS' CAMPS

As Hutchison¹ pointed out, "Camps for travelers looking only for a place to stop overnight may not be a public responsibility." However, there is a real demand for campgrounds that are little more than places to park tired bodies for the night. Unless some campgrounds are designed specifically for overnight travelers, they will continue to crowd into areas designed for more deliberate camping. Whether left to private owners, run by concessionaires or public agencies, **travelers' camps** probably should be considered as part of any overall system of campgrounds (fig. 6).

These camps would be designed for travelers who are in a hurry and who wish inexpensive accommodations. Such visitors probably would not worry much about lack of natural surroundings but would be most interested in low cost and in conveniences that save time. Travelers' camps therefore may need to be of such size and design that they provide the lowest per unit construction and maintenance costs while still providing adequate privacy and conveniences. All the management techniques used for city landscapes may be needed to retain pleasant surroundings, and permanent accommodations such as tents with floors might be desirable.

Travelers' camps would be located close to major highways; they might have showers, flush toilets, and laundry facilities, but would not need to offer any particular recreational activities. Locations should be about a day's drive from other places where cross-country travelers are likely to stay overnight. Since entrance fees to recover all costs would be highly desirable, travelers' camps might best be operated by private owners or concessionaires under special-use permits.

¹Hutchison, S. Blair. Recreation opportunities and problems in the National Forests of the Northern and Intermountain Regions, U.S. Forest Serv. Intermountain Forest and Range Expt. Sta. Res. Paper 66. 1962. Ogden, Utah.



Photo: U. S. Forest Service

Figure 5.—Long-term camps would provide for people who want to camp a month or more. (Concession-operated Twin Lakes Campground, Allegheny National Forest, Pennsylvania.)

Figure 6.—Travelers' camps would provide overnight accommodations for travelers who are in a hurry but want economy and convenience. Tent-cabins, such as those designed by the Grand Teton Lodge Company, would meet this need and might also be desirable at central camps. (Coulter Bay Tent Village, Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming.)

Photo: Grand Teton Lodge Company



BACK-COUNTRY CAMPING AREAS

Wherever possible, it will be desirable to allow unrestricted choice of campsites in the back country. Such freedom of choice is one of the reasons people leave the roads and seek out these areas. However, some back-country areas are already being used so heavily that they are rapidly deteriorating.^{2 3} This is especially true where groups use large numbers of pack and saddle horses. Where back-country areas are in danger of overuse, it may be necessary to protect them by establishing campsites and encouraging their use. Careful location of trails may disperse visitors and prevent concentrated use in the near future. But in problem areas, the size and itinerary of each back-country party might eventually have to be controlled.

LARGE BACK-COUNTRY CAMPS

Where uncontrolled use by large groups would damage off-highway areas, campsites to provide safe water, toilets, and permanent fire spots would need to be established. In horse country, corrals would also be needed to keep pack and saddle stock in designated areas.

Where deterioration is becoming a problem, all groups of more than about 15 people

²Snyder, A. P. Wilderness Area management—an administrative study of a portion of the High Sierra Wilderness Area. U. S. Dept. Agr., Forest Serv., Region 5, San Francisco Calif. 1960.

³Hutchison. *Op. cit.*

or 5 horses might be required to use these **large back-country camps**. The size of these camps and the number of parties allowed to use them would depend on allowable harvests of forage and firewood and on the durability of the campsites themselves. For some areas it might be necessary to limit the number of horses used by one party.⁴

SMALL BACK-COUNTRY CAMPS

Small groups also use some back-country areas heavily enough to cause deterioration. Where these problems occur, campsites might be established with the minimum facilities needed to provide safe water, adequate sanitation, and to prevent each party from choosing and using a new fire spot (fig. 7). Where several campsites are needed, they could be widely spaced to maintain solitude and to put minimum stress on the area itself. Provision might be made for one or two horses used by a small group. But groups with more than a few people or with more than a few animals should not use these small camps.

⁴J. V. K. Wagar in a personal communication to the author has observed that some outfitters use lighter equipment than others. Light equipment requires fewer pack horses, thus fewer wranglers, and therefore fewer horses to carry wranglers, their food, and their equipment. Lists of especially suitable food and equipment might be developed to help outfitters reduce the number of horses needed for a given number of riders. However, it would not be desirable to standardize so completely that the traditions and methods of local outfitters would be lost.



Photo: U. S. Forest Service

Figure 7.—Small back-country camps would prevent the spread of damage at sites used frequently by small groups. Canoeists in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, Superior National Forest, Minnesota.

A CAMPGROUND SYSTEM

All of the campground types suggested here are already in existence. But there is still need to incorporate these types within a system that will allocate the broad range of available camping opportunities among the great variety of camping needs. Once different kinds of campgrounds are labeled and listed in directories, campers can seek out the kinds suited to their tastes. Future planning and construction can then be guided by demonstrated needs. However, location of campgrounds will have to depend on many factors.

Too often, recreation has been viewed primarily in terms of access and unrestricted use — about the way people thought of timber a century ago. But there is increasingly a need to guide types and levels of use to conform to the capabilities of the resource. Placement of campgrounds can be a management tool to flow recreationists away from overused areas into equally suitable areas that are underused. This would be preferable to developing unsuitable areas because camping pressure had already gained the upper hand. Selection of each campground location would have to include considerations of demand, recreation resources, accessibility, present and

rotation ages of timber, other forest uses, availability of safe drinking water, fire and health hazards, and durability of the site itself.

If the various categories of campgrounds are to provide specific types of experiences, thoughtful administration will be needed in addition to careful location. Intensity of use and means of access may need particular attention. For example, the quality of experience offered by a forest camp would change drastically if the area were used at twice its designed capacity. As for access, the experience of a hiking camper at a small back-country camp might be spoiled by others using horses. And the experiences of both hikers and horseback riders might be marred by the presence of trail scooters or jeeps. Thus, some controls may be needed to protect the full range of camping experiences.

By establishing and managing different types of campgrounds within an overall plan, those who provide campgrounds might more fully meet the full spectrum of camping needs. At the same time, this planning could reduce the impact of camping on the many other land uses needed by society.

Wagar, J. Alan

1963. Campgrounds for many tastes. U.S. Dept. Agr., Forest Serv., Intermountain Forest and Range Expt. Sta., Ogden, Utah. 10+ pp., illus. (U.S. Forest Serv. Res. Paper INT-6)

The varied needs of different campers cannot be fulfilled by one type of campground. This paper discusses the range of campgrounds needed and proposes categories of campgrounds that may provide this range. Different categories should complement each other as parts of a system that may include several government agencies and private enterprise.

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